



Saturday 2nd February 2019



Southend 1 – Bristol Rovers 2



In 1951 staff working in branches of WH Smith stores all over the country were putting a new book up upon the shelves. Written by John Wyndham, its plot centred around the activities of some bushes which had distinctly antisocial tendencies. A similar novel could well get written today and its theme too would be malevolently minded undergrowth. Only the shrubs in question wouldn't have roots that occasionally rose up out of the soil. No instead their preferred habitat would be the lower regions of the majority of the Thunderbirds mooshes!

Anyone unfortunate enough to stray anywhere near the TBirds eyrie today was accosted by the sight of a hedgerow of yapping foliage. Although beady, runny, eyes did indeed peer out from somewhere underneath all the tangled branches and twigs, there was no escaping the general impression that one had inadvertently wandered into a forest. A noisy one too. No trees could lie down here for a nap without anyone noticing!

But just why so many Thunderbirds had decided to cast away their razors is an unknown. Mike alone amongst their male population (Marlene had none too gently declined an offer to become a Bearded Lady) was unencumbered by a chin full of sprouting hair. Denzil's was by far the worst. Stand him on his head and he would appear to have reverted back to his long ago yooof when he last sported a full head of hair instead of a bonce that required sun cream protection whenever it was at risk of passing under a street lamp.

However Boycie's attempts to attract nest minded birds couldn't be underestimated as neither too could Alberts. Small rodents were probably his preferred target though, coming up luvvely as they do if exposed to a gentle heat and a couple of spoonfuls of gravy. Trigger's attempt to emulate them had got off to an encouraging start but then wavered on the way. Perhaps it was all the food that kept scraping over his chin that was wearing the weeds back?

Impressive, or indeed otherwise, as their effort were, no way was Chris Packham ever going to be demanding that they be preserved (Not even in pickle?) and the chances of Countryside England declaring them to be a SSSI was equally as slim. Albert might have raised some eyebrows, but as he carries around a card signed by his doctor that states that despite all appearances to the contrary, he is indeed a bona fide descendant of some ape with ambitions to stand upright, such interest as he raised would, as is ever the case, only be short lived.

Mike, raised up in an era of Lassie, Flipper and Skipper, accordingly found it at first difficult to concentrate upon the game. He kept on expecting some exhausted creature to emerge from the jungle that was sited right next to him and start jumping up and down or waving its limbs to tell him that someone had fallen down a well, broken one arm and also a leg, but was otherwise okay save for the giant snake that was heading towards them. Accordingly the activities of Cox and co were, understandably, somewhat off stage at first.

But then, as Blue began pushing forward, so all thoughts of the cast of Animal Magic got pushed aside. With a dismal home record hanging over our necks, we were obviously looking to do something about it and, having already beaten Bristol Rovers at their place, we were looking good to repeat that experience at ours. For all of about two minutes!

What is it with us at Roots Hall? Is there some chemical within the fresh paint that decorates our changing room which causes our batteries to run flat after five minutes? Is it the sight of the Blue Belles filing into theirs that distracts minds? Or is it the sound of that awful Scottish song filtering out from the West Stand that stops us in our tracks? Whatever it is, Chrissy has to find the cure and fast!

Our season, fatally damaged by injuries, has presented supporters with very little to cheer about. Given that over half the first team are still absent with letters headed by the address of their local doctors surgery (Or does just a quick note from Ben suffice?) that's not overly surprising. Indeed our current position is mid table is to be applauded. However that happy situation is now coming under threat. Grave threat, especially with fixtures against Doncaster, Charlton, Portsmouth and Barnsley featuring so heavily in our forthcoming attractions list. Can anyone truly see us getting even a point out of those four games?

We do have an 'A' team though. Made up of Bishop, White, Moore and Cox, the 'Adventurous Four' can be relied upon to turn up with their boots firmly on whatever the occasion. Elvis or Yearwood occasionally turn us into the 'Famous Five' (One of the few positives to be taken from this game was the one or two brief hints that the latter is finally rediscovering his form and confidence) but as to us ever becoming the 'Secret Seven', just forget it. We simply do not have that many players on our books whose hearts are anywhere near their sleeves. So, with the transfer window just having closed, why was that not addressed?

Well the club certainly tried, and two fresh faces do sit around the dining table at Boots and Laces. More though were needed and this was also recognised. However at least four attempts at securing the services of other players failed. Our location, both in terms of geography and finances, is a historical problem, equally the wages that we can offer fall far short of other clubs (Sunderland, saddled with a parachute payment of millions upon millions, somehow out bidding us for the services of one player) and, sad to say, on any tv quiz show our name regularly fails to turn up amongst those listed by contestants eager to enjoy the Sunderland experience for themselves. It's not a case of 'No one likes us', just more that 'No One knows us'!

The summer window, when many more players find themselves unemployed, will provide us with more, and probably richer, pickings. But, in the here and now, we desperately needed at least one more player. And it very nearly happened, Robinson's departure on loan to Swindon for the rest of the season, enabling us to increase the offer that we were putting to one individual just as the minute hand on the clock began its final circuit. Unfortunately it still wasn't enough to attract them South. So, although the departure of Robinson and McCoulsky won't hardly be noticed, except perhaps by the appearance of an additional empty seat or two amongst the substitutes, our squad size has remained static.

The good news, yes there is some despite all the fears, is that a number of our injured are beginning to return to health. In fact a few have already commenced gentle training. Whether they will return to the 1st team in time to help us stave off the threat of relegation, something that had been reduced to the size of a man's fist but is now looming like Everest's shadow over us is somewhat doubtful. But, a big but, if just their presence is enough to shake the dust that has accumulated over too many of our complacent player's boots, then that might just be enough. Fingers crossed!

Defensively and up front we do definitely have the resources to get us through this. Humphries has the look of a decent player about him but, just like the hard working Cox, derive him of any service and all you have on your hands is a Thunderbird, furry faced or not. Anyone of the vegetable plants decorating the seats next to Mike's could do just as good a job as either one of our forwards when they are being starved of the ball. Ok, so the sight of Trigger chasing after his picnic bag might not be quite as edifying as watching Cox run for the ball and equally, although Boycie could probably jump up just as enthusiastically as Humphries whenever the ball gets hoofed forwards, its sadly doubtful that his fall back to earth would be anything like as graceful.

So, once again, then it's our midfield that attracts the critical eye. As already mentioned, Yearwood displayed some encouraging signs during this game but what can just one man, a young and unexperienced one at that, bring to a party where the club captain is running around in ever defeated circles (Did he win one tackle?) and the player, brought to the club presumably for his ability to win the ball in the air, was Rodney inside a betting shop small winnings being reported but bigger losses mysteriously remaining unexplained.

There's a bloke. Don't know his name I'm afraid, but we've all seen him kicking the ball at our goalkeepers before games. He points to their left and the ball goes to their left, he points to their right and the ball goes to their right. He points to their hands and the ball ... well you know the story. Basic skills, performed correctly every time and that is exactly what we are crying out for in the middle of the pitch. Chrissy, please give him blue shirt, you can have mine! and play him. Then at least our forwards might occasionally see a well-directed, and more importantly, forward, pass!

Don't let the score line fool you because we lost this game twice. Once out on the pitch, and once in the dressing room. Our heads are just not right when it comes to a home game. The fight and determination that we sometimes see at away games is totally absent at the Hall. Nobody, the members of the 'Famous Five' excepted, shows any sign of desire, fire or determination about them. If over 70% of the team are just going to continue not showing up then we are heading in just one direction, and it isn't up!

Chrissy, being 'Mr Nice Guy' has succeeded in obtaining us a mooring post in midstream. But our anchor is beginning to slip, and fast. So, if our season isn't to simply drift onto the rocks, our engine room needs to be giving a very firm kick in the vitals, right now. Captain Bligh took great care of his plants and look where he ended up. Mike is now looking like being stranded in a very similar position; a situation that makes Robinson Crusoe's island a rather attractive proposition. But he, for one is up for the fight. The big question though is, are you?

Come on you Blues!